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FOR

MATURE

READERS

AN UNLIKELY GROWTH

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

"MY ENVELOPE ISN'T ANY GOOD ANY MORE"

COOKING CONSIDERED AS ONE OF THE FINE ARTS

THE

brief

SANDMAN™

lives

written by

NEIL GAIMAN

illustrated by

JILL THOMPSON

and

VINCE LOCKE

CHERRIES ARE COUNTED, AND A BARGAIN IS MADE

LIFE AS A GLASS OF BITTER WINE

WHERE ALL MAZES MEET

Well? Where have you been?

DOWN TO THE VILLAGE. GETTING SOME PROVISIONS IN.

Uh...did you happen to get any salami?

Any chocolate?

POSSIBLY.

OH, I DOUBT IT.

What did you get all that food for?

HAS IT EVER OCCURRED TO YOU, BARNABAS, THAT COOKING IS ONE OF THE FINE ARTS?

Not that I recall, no.

IT IS. ONE TAKES RAW MATERIALS--

--AND ONE TRANSFORMS THEM, BY THE SIMPLE APPLI-CATION OF A KNIFE, SOME HEAT, SOME JUDICIOUS MIXING, INTO SOMETHING MIRACU-LOUSLY OTHER.

You've never cooked anything as long as I've known you.

No.

HAVEN'T I?

Am I going to get any of this heavenly repast, once it's complete?

THAT DEPENDS ON HOW IT TURNS OUT.

This is another one of your *ideas*, isn't it? Like that *thing* you left in the garden.

THING? *THING?*

BARNABAS, THAT *THING* IS A SCULPTURE.

What *of*? A big rock with holes in it?

HAAA! HAHAHAHA HAHAHA!

I'LL TELL YOU WHAT, BARNABAS.

THE HAMMER AND CHISEL ARE OUTSIDE IN THE HALL. THERE'S ANOTHER MARBLE BLOCK UPSTAIRS. WHY DON'T *YOU* DO YOUR *OWN* SCULPTURE, AND *I'LL* LAUGH AT WHAT *YOU* MAKE?

Hmph. Leaving aside the issue of hands, I have *no* desire to ruin a perfectly good piece of marble. Dogs have more *sense*. We don't make fools of ourselves like you do.

OF *COURSE* YOU DON'T.

Some of us, after all, have *dignity*.

You know, there have been more crashings and bashings and bubblings from that back room of yours.

I'M SURE THERE *HAVE* BEEN.

NOW, WHAT COULD I HAVE BEEN THINKING OF? I *DID* BUY SOME CHOCOLATE AFTER ALL.

Really?

OKAY... *SIT!*

NOW *BEG!*

HERE YOU GO!

Good chocolate.

Hey, that was *fun*. Can we do it *again*? Please?

Come on. *Please?*

LEAVE ME TO COOK, BARNABAS.

A CULINARY ARTIST NEEDS *GENIUS, IN-SPIRATION,* AND A *DOG-FREE KITCHEN.*

So you'll settle for one out of three, huh?

Hee! He-he-he-he-heh!

BARNABAS...

HAA! HAHAHAHAHAHAHA!

I'M COLD. I HATE BEING NOWHERE. LET'S GO SOMEWHERE INSTEAD.

Very well.

BUT I DON'T KNOW WHERE ETAIN IS. AND THE ALDER MAN'S GONE TO BE NO ONE FOR A BIT. HE WON'T TALK TO US.

AND THE OTHERS ARE SORT OF DEAD.

MY ENVELOPE ISN'T ANY GOOD ANY MORE.

There are places to look. We will find him.

Let us leave this place. We shall seek answers. We may also seek questions.

OH.

DREAMS? I WISH YOU'D TELL ME WHAT WAS GOING ON.

DON'T TREAT ME LIKE I DON'T MATTER. YOU MUSTN'T DO THAT ANY MORE.

...Very well.

This is a family matter. We shall take it to the family.

NO.

ALL OF THEM? YOU'RE GOING TO CALL A MEETING?

THEN WHO? DESIRE SAID NO. AND DESPAIR TOLD ME, NO, I WON'T HELP YOU. SHE SAID IT.

Our elder brother.

We will walk there.

DESTINY? OH. OKAY. ARE WE GOING TO YOUR GALLERY?

BUT WE'LL NEED A THING. WITH ALL THE WIGGLY THINGIES COMING OUT OF IT.

UM.

A LABYRINTH.

Yes. Would you like to find one? Or shall I?

Certainly.

CAN I? REALLY?

DELIRIUM CLOSES HER MISMATCHED EYES.

A WHISPER, A FLUTTER, AND SILENCE FALLS ONCE MORE, BETWEEN THE WORLDS.

AROUND THEM CHILDREN RUN AND SHOUT AND ADULTS WALK. NO ONE SEES THEM, NO ONE TOUCHES THEM.

NO ONE KNOWS THAT THEY ARE EVEN THERE AT ALL.

SEVEN: COOKING CONSIDERED AS ONE OF THE FINE ARTS—"MY ENVELOPE ISN'T ANY GOOD ANYMORE"—WHERE ALL MAZES MEET—THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN—LIFE AS A GLASS OF BITTER WINE—CHERRIES ARE COUNTED, AND A BARGAIN IS MADE—AN UNLIKELY GROWTH.

SANDMAN featuring characters created by Neil Gaiman, Mike Dringenberg, and Sam Kieth.

Words by Neil Gaiman. Pictures by Jill Thompson. Inks by Vince Locke and Dick Giordano. Colors by Daniel Vozzo. Letters by Todd Klein. Edits by Karen Berger.

If you go in you may never come OUT!

IS THIS. UM. OKAY?

Don't go in if you're in a hurry!

This is perfectly satisfactory, my sister.

WHICH WAY?

OH. GOOD.

LOOK it's CRAZY MAZ

ALL LABYRINTHS ARE ONE LABYRINTH. ALL MAZES MEET IN THE CENTER.

THERE IS A PORTION OF SPACE THAT ALL LABYRINTHS SHARE, A SPACE COMMON TO EVERY PLACE IN WHICH PATHS FORK AND JOIN AND DIVERGE ONCE MORE.

TURN. RIGHT. LEFT.

LEFT. TURN.

ONE BY ONE THE OTHER MAZE-WALKERS VANISH.

SLOWLY THE HIGH WOODEN WALLS BEGIN TO CHANGE THEIR SHAPE, TO SPREAD OUT AND CHANGE, TO BRANCH AND DIVERGE.

THE WALLS BECOME HEDGES.

ODD ITEMS OF STATUARY BEGIN TO APPEAR.

RIGHT. LEFT. RIGHT AGAIN.

THEY STEP INTO A PATCH OF MIST: ABOVE THEM CARRION BIRDS CAW AND SHRIEK, AND THEN ARE SILENT FOREVER.

BRIEFLY, IT IS NIGHT; THEN DAWN BEGINS TO LIGHTEN THE SKY.

THEY CROSS A RIVER: THEIR FEET TRIP-TRAP ACROSS THE LITTLE WOODEN BRIDGE.

THEY KEEP WALKING.

AN OLD RED SUN HANGS LOW IN THE GRAY SKY.

THIS IS NOT EARTH. THIS IS NOT NOW. THIS IS DESTINY'S GARDEN, THAT IS A PLACE TO ITSELF, AND EXISTS IN ITS OWN TIME.

PATHS CONNECT AND DIVERGE IN THIS PLACE.

DREAM RESPECTS HIS BROTHER, BUT THE GARDEN OF DESTINY DISTURBS HIM.

IT IS USUAL, HOWEVER, FOR THE ENDLESS TO FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE IN EACH OTHER'S REALMS; ONLY DEATH TRAVELS WHERESOEVER SHE MUST, WITHOUT MISGIVING.

THE GARDEN OF DESTINY. LOOK BEHIND YOU: SHADOW-PLAYS OF MEMORY ARE FOREVER BEING ENACTED, ON PATHS YOU WALKED TOO LONG AGO.

DREAM? LOOK.

IS THAT ME?

Yes. It IS you. You, a very long time ago.

Yes. You were.

I WAS VERY PRETTY.

I... REMEMBER THAT DAY: DANCING MEN CAME TO ME FROM A FAR WORLD, BRINGING TRIBUTE, OF BIRDS AND FLOWERS AND FINE GEMS. THEY WERE GRATEFUL FOR... FOR WHAT?

Happiness, perhaps?

MM. SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

YES. YOU TWO ARRIVE HERE NOW.

WELCOME TO MY GARDEN.

It is good to know that we were expected, my brother.

I take it you also know why we are here.

INDEED.

Well? Will you assist us? Will you offer us advice?

CERTAINLY.

REALLY? OH... WOW...

Give me your advice, my brother.

VERY WELL: FORGET THIS FOOLISHNESS. DROP IT. GO HOME.

OUR BROTHER TOLD US THAT HE WAS LEAVING US. HE ADVISED US TO LEAVE HIM BE. UNTIL NOW YOU HAVE BEEN CONTENT TO RESPECT HIS WISHES; DO LIKEWISE IN THE TIME TO COME.

I cannot do that, my brother, as you well know.

I KNOW.

AND I AM SORRY.

Will you tell us where to find him?

I AM DESTINY. I AM WHAT **MUST** HAPPEN, WILL IT OR NO. **AND** I AM YOUR BROTHER.

IF I COULD LIVE YOUR LIFE FOR YOU, I WOULD. BUT THAT IS NOT WITHIN MY POWER.

Life, Brother? A strange way of describing our existence.

Is there naught else you can tell me?

NOTHING **YOU** WOULD WANT TO HEAR.

SHE DOES **NOT** LOVE YOU, AND, TRULY, SHE NEVER **DID**. SHE WILL NOT CHANGE HER MIND, NO MATTER HOW LONG NOR HOW DEEPLY YOU WISH THAT THIS WERE THE CASE.

YOU WILL SEE HER BUT ONE MORE TIME, LONG AFTER ALL THIS IS OVER, AND THE OUTCOME OF THAT MEETING WILL NOT BE SATISFACTORY FOR **EITHER** OF YOU.

I did not wish to be told that.

YOU ASKED ME TO TELL YOU WHAT YOU NEEDED TO KNOW; NOT WHAT YOU WISHED TO HEAR.

WELL AND ALL: AND WHILE **YOU** ARE PRINCE OF THOSE SYMBOLS AND SHAPES THAT MEAN OTHER THAN THEY SEEM, OF METAPHOR AND OF ALLUSION, **MY** DOMINION IS THAT WHICH **IS**, OF ACTIONS AND CONSEQUENCES AND PATHS.

BUT I CAN NEITHER LIVE YOUR LIFE FOR YOU, NOR SHOULDER YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES.

You will not tell me where our brother is to be found?

I MAY TELL YOU **ONLY** WHAT **OTHERS** HAVE TOLD YOU: YOU NEED AN ORACLE.

There are no Oracles who can tell of our family.

YOU THOUGHT OF ONE, WHEN YOU SPOKE TO THE CAT-GODDESS, DID YOU NOT?

THERE IS, AFTER ALL, AN ORACLE WHO IS OF THE FAMILY.

NO...

GOOD. THAT IS A FAR MORE SENSIBLE ATTITUDE.

DREAM? WHAT'S HE SAYING?

WHAT DID YOU TELL HIM?

SURELY THAT IS HIS AFFAIR, NOT YOURS.

DO YOU KNOW WHY I STOPPED BEING DELIGHT, MY BROTHER?

I DO.

THERE ARE THINGS NOT IN YOUR BOOK. THERE ARE PATHS OUTSIDE THIS GARDEN. YOU WOULD DO WELL TO REMEMBER THAT.

IT IS... REFRESHING... TO SEE YOU SO COLLECTED.

STICK IT. COINS HAVE TWO SIDES. DESTRUCTION TOLD US THAT, WHEN HE TOLD US HE WAS LEAVING. BUT I KNEW IT ALREADY. YOU DID TOO.

DREAM? WHAT DID HE TELL YOU?

Delirium?

IT'S STILL ME.

But...?

IF YOU'RE GOING TO FALL APART, THEN ONE OF US HAS TO KEEP THIS THING GOING.

PLEASE GET UP.

I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH LONGER I CAN BE LIKE THIS.

IT HURTS VERY MUCHLY.

Your eyes are the same color.

SO? I CAN DO THAT. I CAN DO THAT IF I HAVE TO.

Well, my sister. Shall we continue on our way?

YES.

PLEASE.

WHERE ARE WE GOING NOW?

To seek an Oracle.

DESTINY STANDS AND WATCHES HIS SISTER AND BROTHER AS THEY VANISH FROM HIS GARDEN. A LOW WIND COMES UP AND STIRS THE CORNERS OF THE PAGES OF HIS BOOK, THEN GUSTS, SUDDENLY.

THE WIND LIFTS THE PAGES OF THE BOOK, FLIPS AND TURNS THEM, RETURNING HIM TO A CHAPTER HE READ LAST ALMOST 300 YEARS BEFORE.

IN DESTINY'S GARDEN IT IS ALWAYS NOW.

FLIP.

IN THE GREAT HALL OF THE CITADEL OF DESTINY, DESTRUCTION HAS GATHERED THE FAMILY TOGETHER.

DESTINY'S SERVANTS FLIT AND FLAP AMONG THEM, BRINGING WINES AND FRUIT FROM HIS GARDEN.

DESTRUCTION TELLS THEM HE IS LEAVING. THAT THEY ARE NOT TO FOLLOW HIM. THAT THEY MUST NO LONGER CONSIDER HIM ONE OF THEM.

EACH SIBLING REACTS IN ITS FASHION: DESTINY WATCHES DESTINY (WITH, PERHAPS, SOME SMALL APPROVAL) APPEAR CALM AND UNSURPRISED;

DEATH SAYS NOTHING;

DREAM BLUSTERS;

DESIRE SMIRKS, AS IF DESIRE CHERISHES ELEGANT SECRETS BEHIND ITS TAWNY EYES; DESPAIR PLEADS WITH HIM TO RECONSIDER; AND DELIRIUM...

DELIRIUM, LIKE DEATH, SAYS NOTHING. SHE SIPS THE WINE OF DESTINY, AND MAKES A SUDDEN FACE, AS IF IT HAS UNEXPECTEDLY BECOME QUITE BITTER. BUT THE WINE OF DESTINY IS VERY FINE.

FLIP. FLUTTER. FLIP.

THE DREAM-KING IS RETURNING, IN TRIUMPH OF A KIND, FROM A FAR GALAXY, TIRED BEYOND RECKONING AND TRIED BEYOND ALL ENDURANCE.

HIS TRIUMPH IS SHORT-LIVED: FROM THE DARKNESS OLD VOICES CALL TO HIM, AND HE AWAKES IN A GLASS PRISON IN A DEEP CELLAR.

FLIP. FLUTTER. FLIP.

ALL TIMES ARE NOW. THE PAGES TURN, THOUGH NO HAND TOUCHES THEM, AND DESTINY MAKES NO EFFORT TO PREVENT THEM FROM TURNING.

BY THE YANGTZE RIVER, DEATH SPENDS HER DAY MORTAL WALKING UNDER THE HOT SUN WITH A YOUNG OX DROVER, WHO TELLS THE LITTLE PEASANT GIRL HIS GRAND SCHEMES AND PLANS.

AT NIGHTFALL HER HANDS SEEK HIS, AND THEY SIT AND WAIT BY THE VAST SLOW RIVER, HAND IN HAND BENEATH THE MYRIAD STARS...

THE PAGES TURN AND GUST AND TURN, FIRST ONE WAY, THEN ANOTHER.

THERE IS BLOOD ON THE THRONE OF THE DREAM KING. THE CORINTHIAN STANDS BEHIND IT, TREMBLING -- RED, WET, TEARS DRIBBLING FROM HIS MOUTHS. THE DREAM KING LOOKS UP, SLOWLY, AND SPEAKS TO HIM. HE IS DRESSED ENTIRELY IN WHITE.

DESTINY REACHES FOR THE BOOK. HIS LEAN FINGERS CALM THE NERVOUS PAGES AND FIND HIS PLACE ONCE MORE.

HE READS: IT WAS LATE AFTERNOON WHEN THEY REACHED THE ISLAND.

IT WAS LATE AFTERNOON WHEN THEY REACHED THE ISLAND, AND THE WARM AIR SMELLED OF PINE NEEDLES AND THE SEA.

SO. THIS ORACLE.

IS THIS SOMEONE YOU KNOW?

Yes.

IS IT SOMEONE I KNOW, TOO?

Yes.

OH.

IS IT SOMEBODY VERY OLD?

NO.

HAVE YOU EVER SPENT DAYS AND DAYS AND DAYS MAKING UP FLAVORS OF ICE CREAM THAT NO ONE'S EVER EATEN BEFORE?

LIKE CHICKEN AND TELEPHONE ICE CREAM?

NO.

WHY DON'T YOU WANT TO SEE THIS PERSON?

Because I gave my word I would not.

WHO DID YOU GIVE YOUR WORD TO?

To myself.

OH.

YOU TWO!

STAY WHERE YOU ARE.

HOW DID YOU GET UP HERE?

We walked.

YOU COULD NOT HAVE WALKED HERE.

Nevertheless, we walked.

BUT I'M A REALLY GOOD DRIVER.

NO LIES. IF YOU'D CLIMBED THE CLIFF THEN I'D KNOW ABOUT IT. NOW, HOW DID YOU GET UP HERE? THE TRUTH THIS TIME.

I do not lie.

WAIT HERE. STAY VERY STILL. ONE FALSE MOVE, AND I WILL SHOOT YOU.

HELLO? FATHER? COME IN.

WE HAVE PEOPLE UP HERE. TWO OF THEM. A MAN AND A WOMAN.

THEY WILL NOT TELL ME.

I DON'T THINK SO.

YES. I'LL WAIT HERE.

WHAT'S A FALSE MOVE? IS IT VERY DIFFERENT FROM A REALONE?

GREEN MOUSE ICE CREAM WAS THE WORST. I DIDN'T LIKE THAT AT ALL.

HEH... WHO ARE YOU? EH? HOW DID YOU GET UP HERE?

We walked the path.

THERE IS NO PATH THAT LEADS UP HERE.

There are a number of paths that lead to this place.

I have been avoiding them for some small while, now.

WE STARTED OUT IN A MAZE PLACE AND THEN WE WENT TO MY BROTHER'S GARDEN AND THEN WE CAME HERE AND IT WAS ONE PATH.

I have come here to speak to my son. Please lead me to him.

YOUR SON?

I believe he is here.

ANDROS. WHAT TONGUE DO YOU HEAR WHEN THEY TALK?

THEY ARE SPEAKING GREEK, KRIS.

HM. AND YOU, SON?

THEY SPEAK GREEK, PAPA.

AND I HEAR THEM SPEAKING ENGLISH.

You hear what you need to hear. Now, take me to my son.

ARE YOU APOLLO?

I am your charge's father. Take me to him.

ANDROS?

OUR LORD TALKED TO ME THIS MORNING. HE WARNED ME THAT TODAY MIGHT PROVE AN UNUSUAL DAY.

HE DID NOT SAY HOW UNUSUAL.

SHALL I SHOW YOU IN?

That...

That will not be necessary.

I have... no desire to do this, my sister.

I KNOW.

I'M SORRY.

TINKER... TAILOR... SOLDIER... SAILOR... RICH MAN... POOR MAN... BEGGAR-MAN...

HMM. MORE CHERRIES..

ELF-LORD... IVY... VINEGAR... TOAD... VIRGIN... PILGRIM... KANGAROO...

LADY JOHANNA CONSTANTINE born 1760 died 1859

We have spoken. It is done.

LADY JOHANNA CONSTANTINE born 1760 died 1859

YOU TALKED TO HIM?

Indeed. As he talked to me.

DID HE TELL YOU?

Where our brother is?

Yes. he told me.

DID... IT. LIM. I DON'T KNOW. COST YOU ANYTHING?

It cost me a great deal. But no. Not directly. Not now.

But... I...owe my son a boon. In return.

ARE YOU OKAY?

YOU'RE SHIVERING.

I find that difficult to believe, my sister. I am in perfectly fine spirits.

After all, the penultimate step of our quest has been concluded.

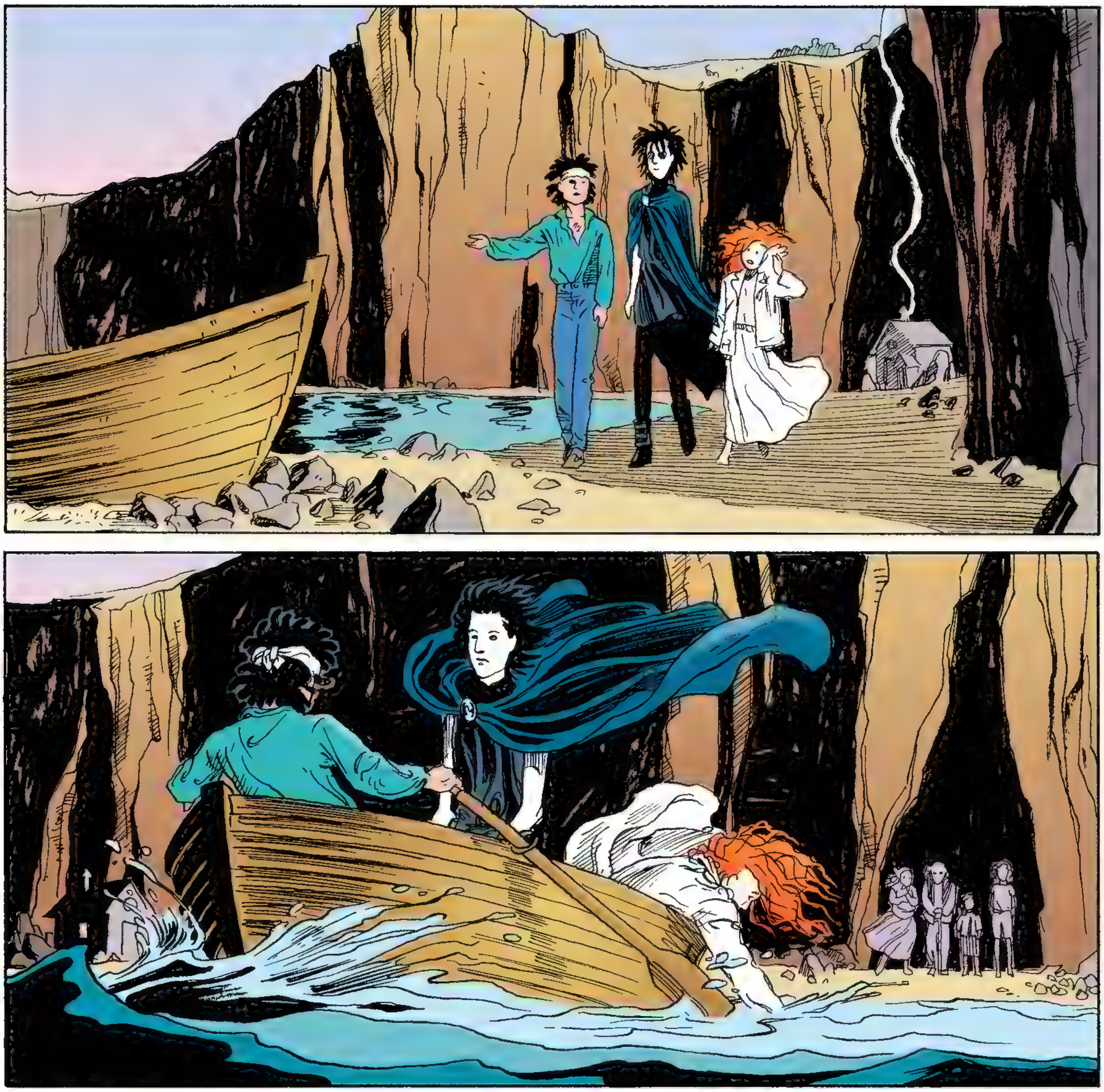
AND NOBODY ELSE GOT KILLED OR EXPLODED OR ANYTHING.

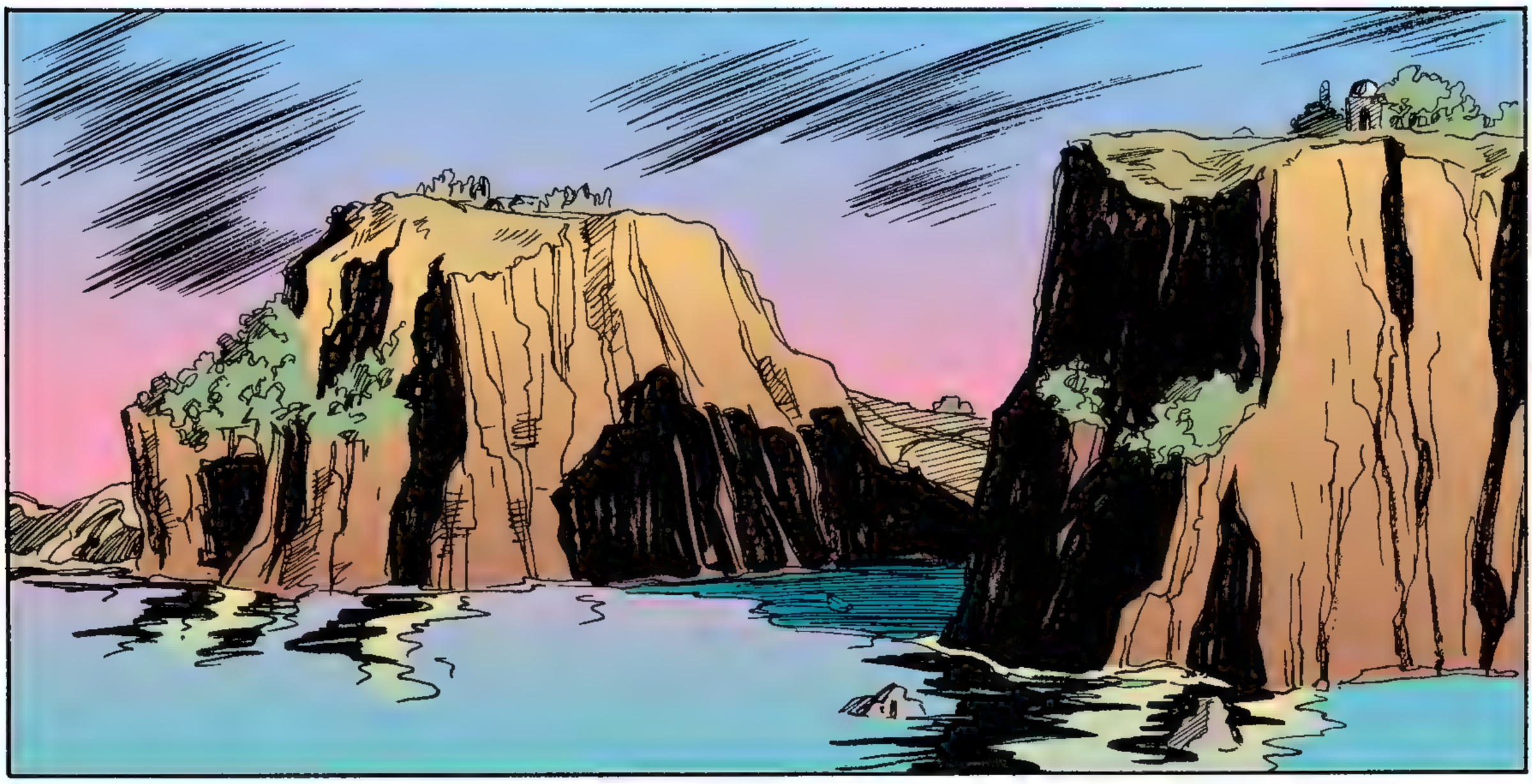
As you say.

No. Not far.

L A D Y
JOHANNA
CONSTANTINE
born 1760
died 1859
"Be to her Virtues very Kind. Be to her faults a little Blind."

IS IT A LONG WAY TO WHERE OUR BROTHER IS?





Thank you, Kris.

HULLO, DOGGY. YOU'RE A VERY NICE DOGGY, AREN'T YOU? YES, YOU ARE. THE CHERRY STONES SAY I'M GOING TO BE A KANGAROO WHEN I GROW UP.

WHAT'S YOUR NAME, THEN?

HIS NAME'S BARNABAS.

WELL, COME UP HERE THEN, YOU TWO. WHERE I CAN SEE YOU PROPERLY.

AH, LET ME LOOK AT YOU, LASS.

PRETTY AS EVER YOU WERE, BY MY TROTH, AND YES, I DO BELIEVE YOU'VE GROWN.

MAYBE.

AND YOU, MY BROTHER. YOU ALSO SEEM DIFFERENT. PERHAPS YOU TOO HAVE GROWN.

It is not likely.

NO? STRANGER THINGS HAVE HAPPENED.

AH, AND LET US REPAIR INSIDE. IT GETS CHILL HERE, OF A SUDDEN, WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN.

YOU MUST HAVE TRAVELLED A LONG WAY.

TO BE HONEST, I WAS EXPECTING YOU TO ARRIVE A LITTLE EARLIER.

BUT NO MATTER. THE DOLMADES MAY BE A TRIFLE COOL, BUT THEY'LL BE NONE THE WORSE FOR THAT, EH?

You were expecting us?

I'M AFRAID SO.

NOW, I AM SURE WE HAVE MUCH TO DISCUSS.

SO, PLEASE: TAKE A SEAT.

I'VE MADE DINNER.

To Be Continued

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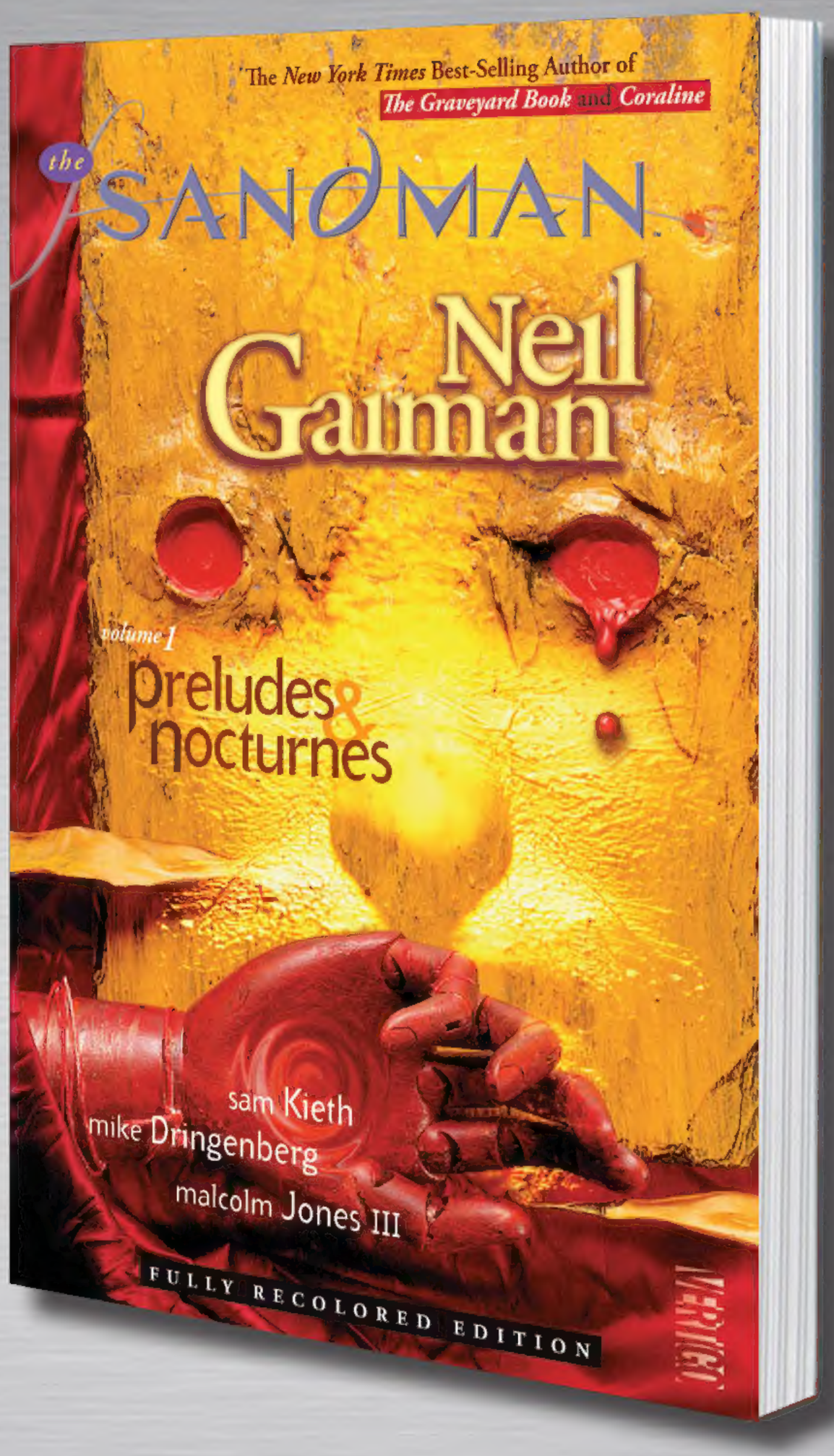

THE SANDMAN VOL. 4:
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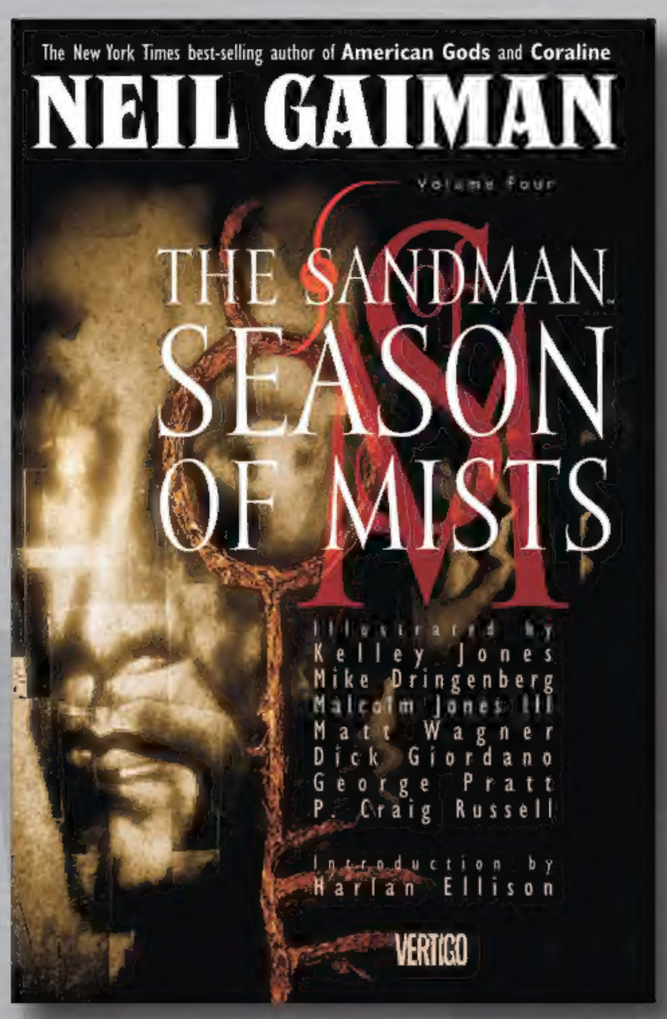

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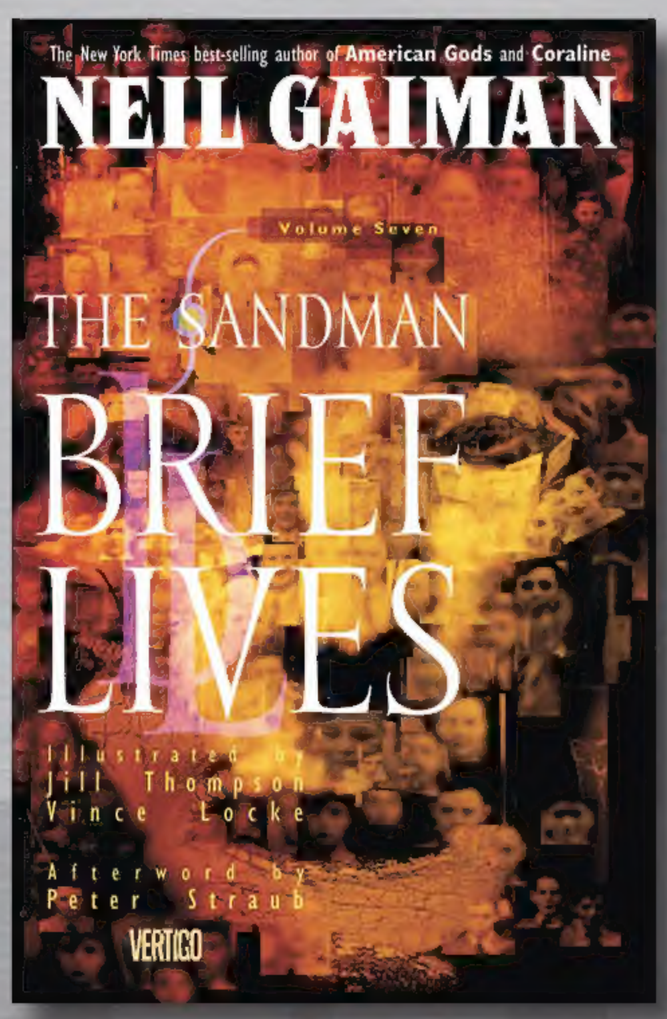

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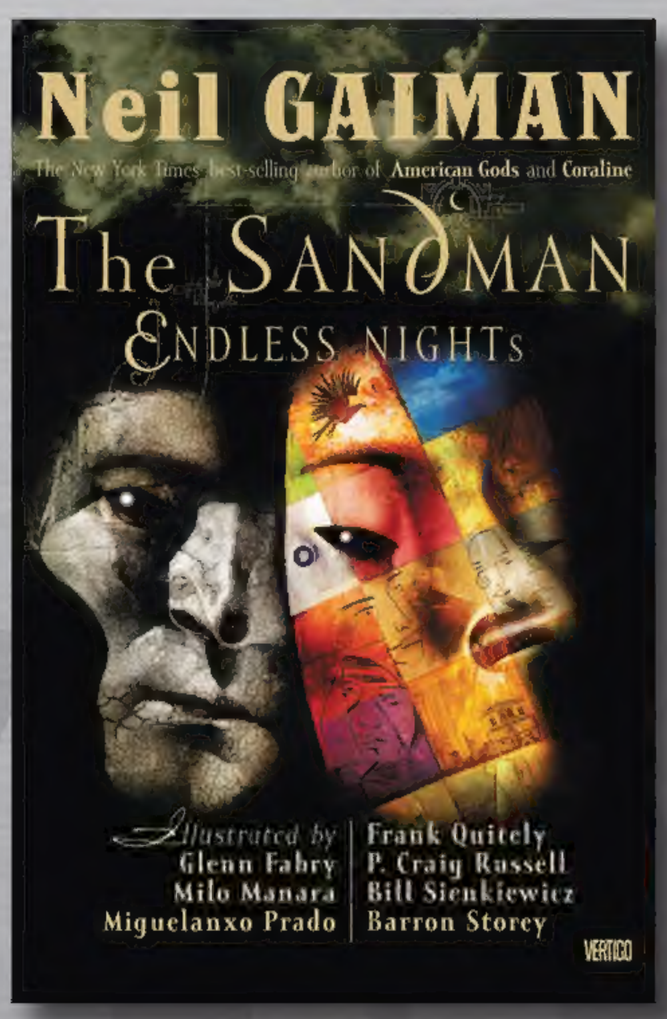

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